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ABSTRACT

A five-year pilot project was initiated at Eastern Washington University (Cheney, Washington) in 1983 to integrate women's scholarship into the university's traditional disciplines. The existing women's studies curriculum committee acted as the project's steering committee and offered assistance to the faculty through selected student resource persons. The resource persons selection was based on their knowledge of the discipline and research skills. Some curriculum innovations by these students included textbook analysis for gender balance, the compilation of information packets, additional lecture materials, guest speakers, and a questionnaire designed to explore business students' attitudes towards women's issues in business. As a result of the project: (1) specific curriculum changes in social work, biology, art, and black studies were incorporated; (2) a brochure describing the project was developed and disseminated; (3) project materials were organized and placed in binders for university departments; and (4) a feminist theory research program series was initiated. The final evaluation of the project has yet to be conducted, but the project will become statewide in the next academic year through three workshops. (DJC)

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GENDER BALANCING THE CURRICULUM WITH FACULTY/STUDENT TEAMWORK: A CASE STUDY

by

Gertrude L. Swedberg

Presented at the University of Minnesota,
NWSA Meetings, June 22, 1988
Minneapolis, MN

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GENDER BALANCING THE CURRICULUM WITH FACULTY/STUDENT TEAMWORK; A CASE STUDY

Presented at the University of Minnesota, NWSA meetings, June 22, 1988

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Eastern Washington University is a public regional institution with 7000 students, co-located in Cheney and Spokane, Washington. It has a strong Women's Studies program which offers a 22 credit minor and 30 Women's Studies courses.

In 1983 Women's Studies began an innovative program to integrate women's content into its curriculum. In the intervening five years it has and is continuing to go through three developmental stages which I'd like to tell you about because they may be useful to others considering such projects. Now CPR teaches you the ABC's for airway, breathing and circulation, so I'll talk about the CDE's of integration - C for courses and curriculum, D for dissemination, and E for educational leadership of others.

First, the Courses and Curriculum

How many geography students know that girls are taught to perceive space differently from boys, which affects how they mapread? How many Latin American history students are taught about the significant role of women in guerilla movements? How many English students have examined the feminist and antifeminist biases in mythology?

In 1983, although the faculty at EWU was by no means united in its dedication to feminist or Women's Studies issues, or the need for woman's curricular content, there was a strong supporting contingent among both teachers and administration upon

which a solid program could be built if certain obstacles could be overcome.

The prcblem for faculty was the lack of time to engage in committee meetings and in research beyond that required by traditional disciplines, especially when no clear incentive or reward was offered. Furthermore, a means was needed to bring women's scholarship to students quickly. Previous projects seemed to interject too much time and red tape between the instructor's good intentions and the student's actual education.

Students, on the other hand, who had taken Women's Studies courses expressed frustration at their inability to see their new academic consciousness reflected in other parts of their education. Therefore an approach to resolve these various problems was devised which would use enthusiastic Women's Studies students to do the research for the overworked faculty.

$5000 support for a pilot project to integrate women's scholarship into the curriculum was obtained from university faculty development funds and from the Northern States Project on Women in the Curriculum (Ford Foundation).

A.PERSONNEL

To address the problems of faculty time and to take advantage of student enthusiasm, the project was designed with four components.

1. The Faculty

A letter to the faculty sent jointly by the Director of Women's Programs and the Vice president/provost for Academic Affairs pointed out an opportunity for conscientious teachers to become current with new scholarship and to implement contemporary

trends in education. It offered assistance in finding academic material about, by, and of interest to women for course inclusion. The letter was repeated the following year.

2. The Curriculum Committee

The already existing curriculum committee of the Women's Studies program acted as the project steering committee. It considered and accepted or rejected course proposals.

3. The Resource Persons

Central to the project were resource persons, who were each to be responsible for the main research in one of the selected courses. Resource persons were required to have background in the disciplinary area in which they were placed. The project director interviewed all candidates and the curriculum committee approved them.

Most of the applicants were graduate and honors undergraduate students with experience in both research and Women's Studies. Each resource person was teamed with a course and its instructor. A personal stipend of $300, plus $100 for copying and literature searches, was allocated for the research member of each team. Some students also received credit in independent study.

4. Library Personnel

Three library faculty members in reference, audio-visual, and technical services added their knowledge to the general meetings of resource persons and participating faculty.

B. COORDINATION

General meetings of all participants were held three times: at the beginning of the project to clarify roles and sort out sources of information, at the midpoint to consider special

issues such as means of including minority women in academic material, and at the end of six months to turn in a completed project. At the final meeting each team submitted to the committee a) a methods description and analysis b) the syllabus from before the project and a revised syllabus of the course, and c) a bibliography.

In January, 1983, fourteen teams began work and in the following two years the courses listed on your handout were integrated. If all sections of all 22 courses became involved, 3000 students were affected.

RESULTS

Some innovations were made very quickly. A discussion between instructor and resource person might result in a class assignment the following day. Generally, although no two courses were alike, activities fell into three areas.

1 Assessments of Traditional Scholarship

After initial discussion of the course and its needs, most of the teams began with a textbook analysis, testing for gender balanced language, graphics and perspective. One did a review of available films, and three engaged in correspondence with publishers and/or authors.

2. New Materials

Scholarship introduced into courses from current literature included historical and sociological data, and interpretive analysis. Several teams compiled information packets for the use of the course, for other instructors of the course, and for additional assignments. New essay, exam, research, lecture, and reading topics were assembled by several teams. Some made computer searches for material. Several engaged guest lecturers,

including the resource persons themselves, and one conducted taped interviews of prominent women in the field.

3. Classroom Interaction

The Teacher Expectation and Student Achievement test, originally developed to evaluate teacher interaction with students perceived as high and low achievers, was applied to teacher interaction with men and women students in one classroom.

Student attitudes were pre and post tested in third and fourth graders and in college students in the primary education demonstration of language usage.

A questionnaire distributed to two sections of a business course, one integrated and one nonintegrated, explored student attitudes to women's issues in business.

DISCUSSION

The project's greatest strength was its student participation. The importance of the enthusiasm from this component cannot be overemphasized. Three teams came into the project because students convinced instructors to submit a course and to use them as resource persons. The sense of being participants in the shaping of their educations, the independent acquisition of knowledge, and the excitement of reforming the face of learning kept the resource persons going after many of the faculty might have otherwise succumbed to academic stagnation.

Some student resource persons used new material in other courses they were taking, and expanded their research into graduate theses or graduate papers. Students brought other students in to interview as resource persons, and six of the

original resource persons applied to be participants again in the second year.

The second stage, Dissemination, took place in the second and third years of the project. As project visibility increased, interest was expressed by other members of the university community. Some of the examples I'm going to give you were initiated by the project or its personnel directly, some indirectly.

* The Social Work department began its own integration program and sent its research staff to the project director for ideas and materials.

* A faculty member and a lab coordinator in the Biology department began an investigation of women's response to the Harvard step test, which is used as a measure of physical fitness in both men and women, but is based exclusively on a male standard.

* Two spinoff courses were developed as a result of the project, one in art, one in black studies

* Several presentations were made at national and regional meetings by faculty, graduate students, or the project director

* A supplemental text was written

* a brochure describing the project was developed and disseminated

* All materials from the project were collected by a curriculum specialist, organized into consistent form and placed in large ring binders in the director's office. Copies were made available to departments.

* The Women's Center began a Feminist Theory research program

series presented by faculty, which has been better attended than any other programs

* The Center also brcught Catharine Stimpson to campus to discuss integration to a general university audience.

* Last January the original instructors and resource people reassembled to discuss where the project had gone, whether a "Save" command had been found, and what should be done next.

There were statements at that meeting that the project work was an incentive to the whole teaching process, that the material is used primarily as a workshop or research guide, that there has been at least some movement of material to other colleagues in the departments, that the material can be used in courses other than the one for which it was prepared. They commented on new integrated textbooks being used or old ones discarded. Some courses had changed instructors and subsequently lost much of the integration done. "Ownership" of integration commitments needed to be disseminated more broadly in the university community, it was felt.

Some felt it was time to be more public within the university; some felt we should be training cther teachers; some wanted to go statewide.

From this meeting came the third stage- Educational Leadership, and a new grant, this time from the Washington Center for the Advancement of Undergraduate Education.

The project will now go statewide. It has a steering committee with representatives from six two and four year institutions.

Course integration will continue, with five general

university requirement courses chosen for integration in the same way as before, except that they will now be model projects. Three workshops drawing a statewide audience will address; a) educating teachers with integration techniques b) exploring ways to reach the larger university community with the integration idea, and c) the public policy issues of integration. Each workshop will have one local and one outside leader.

Six months after the close of the workshop, participants will be contacted for a report on effects within their institutions.

If I come back next year, perhaps I can tell you how well the E stage works.